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HISTORIC POLITICAL UPHEAVALS.

BY EX-SPEAKER REED.

WHEN our forefathers planned the system of government which is contained in the Constitution of the United States they not only had to provide such arrangements as respected the powers and customs which already existed, but they had to reckon also with a deep-seated distrust of the people which had come down from ancient times. Government by the people, pure and simple, for three million human beings was an experiment which might lead to such disorders as would welcome back monarchical forms and the control of the few. Hence almost every one was ready to so shape the action required to bind the States together through concessions to the demands of each that the people should be restrained from immediate control. The result has been that our government, while it was more responsive when constituted to the popular changes, has become less immediately so than the government of Great Britain, which has no written constitution, but which has become by repeated modifications more amenable in some respects to popular wishes because it is a government, in form as well as in substance, of to-day. Whether this very fact that popular will cannot find vent in immediate action does not produce some of the sudden and violent changes which it was intended to guard against may well be a question.

Where no immediate result is to follow, when the election is not to become immediately effective, where it is as it were in the nature of a warning, the pendulum is sometimes swung to a higher point than it will reach on the next return, and shakes up the clock besides.

This generation in which we live has certainly witnessed some remarkably rapid changes from one side to the other which de-

serve careful consideration. In the main, however, they probably represent the same method of motion which the world seems to require for its onward progress towards a higher civilization. If we were under the control of a philosopher, these sudden changes, these frequent swingings from side to side, would seem irrational and wasteful both of onward movement and of prosperity. Undoubtedly we could imagine a world which would proceed upon a continuous up-grade, so many inches to the mile, so many miles to the year, and all without jostle or push, comfortable and serene from dawn to dark. Obviously, however, that is pure imagination—a day-dream of a world which has never existed, of a people which never lived. All history shows that after any great advance the reflux wave has very often obliterated the very signs which marked the starting-point, and yet in the long run the tide has never ceased advancing. Undoubtedly this arises from the very constitution of human nature itself. Life would be very dreary without the element of the unknown, the effects of which we call luck. Men do not want certainties, and are always looking out for the unexpected which they always hope will be better than the known.

History is replete with examples of these strange revulsions, and is a great warning to us not to consider anything as a victory until time has tried it—time which tries all things. When the French Revolution burst through all the safeguards which bound up with church and state the enslavement of the people, a spectator might well have thought that for that nation at least kings and monarchs of all species had passed forever away. So, too, when twenty years afterwards all Europe aroused itself, to put down not the French Republic, for that had already disappeared, but the ideas of the Revolution, its learning and its teachings, and placed over the crushed and exhausted French people the dynasty of other days, every one was sure that the old days had come again in permanence and peace. But history has shown that the old days had passed away, never to return. So when Cromwell was at the zenith of his fame, and England had killed its king and chased his successor out of the kingdom; when John Milton was foreign secretary, and the name of England was respected all over the world, as it had never been since the days of Elizabeth and the defeat of the Spanish Armada,—he would have been a bold man who had prophesied the reign of Charles

the Second, a king who had every power which had been the subject of battle with his dead father, a monarch whose life illustrated every vice and shame which the Puritan despised, and who was at once the pensioner of France and the betrayer of his country. Yet Charles the Second has his place in English history, and his partisans in their turn thought that the free thoughts and high aspirations of the Puritan leaders were never to be anything else but the jest of soulless courtiers and ladies whom the king delighted to honor.

But the principles of liberty had never died, and after three decades of misrule the Puritan uprising ripened into the practices of the Free England, which followed the revolution of 1688. The Free England, of 1688, however, was not the England of Cromwell, or of the long Parliament, but England such as the whole people made it, after a long education by adversity.

Perhaps it is not worth while to try to account fully for these changes and revulsions, and yet it may not be out of place to mention what are probably some of the causes of them. Ultimately, the people govern. There are ostentatious actors here and there, who stride the stage with panoply or with clanging arms, who seem to do many things, but in the end the popular feeling has its way. William the Norman and his barons could conquer England, and be its conspicuous figures in history. They could also have their influence over its institutions and habits, but in the end the English people absorbed the Normans, and are the English people still. Minorities frequently govern, because a man adds to his power by his zeal. It might be very doubtful whether Cromwell and the people of his way of thinking were in the majority when they were in power ; but what they lacked in numbers they made up in courage, zeal, and conduct. One man who knows what he wants to do may be worth a dozen for an event or for a time, but in the final result we count nearer equality than we are willing to say. For the long run it is the intelligence of all which conquers, and not the courage of the few. England, with some of its people vehement for liberty, and the great majority careless, could not become a free people until the leaven had leavened the whole. It took not only the genius of Cromwell, but also the thirty years of Charles the Second, to permeate the people with the desire for liberty.

Good laws and good administration are the achievements of a

good people. A temporary conquest by a minority, even if the laws are abstractly good, is not, and never has been, sufficient. Either the laws will be imperfectly administered, or, if rigidly administered, will be overturned. An ideal law is one which would represent the average sentiment of the people, neither the best nor the worst. Such laws are seldom passed, perhaps, but they ought always to be striven for, and whoever desires to serve his country should seek the happy mean. No one doubts, however, that it is better to aim high than to aim low: for the struggle for something above the public sentiment is an education of the sentiment itself. Still the best foundation for law is the consensus of the largest majority, and the best preparation for good law is universal education of the people. If the educated desire better laws—those more suited to them—there is one sovereign way, and that is to lift the majority to their heights, and then the laws will not only be abstractly right, but practically right.

Our own history has examples of these things more than I can venture to comment upon. To us now it seems as if the Revolution of blessed memory was nearly unanimous, and yet there were Tories, and it has been whispered that they were really in the majority, but the vehement patriots counted for more than they were by reason of stress. But that struggle was terminated by success, and that question settled itself with only the fluctuations of eight years.

This generation has seen not a few of these radical changes, and ought to have a fair judgment on the subject. In our history it has sometimes happened that a great victory was a great defeat. When Mr. Franklin Pierce was chosen President it was by a majority hitherto unknown in our experience. It was then thought that the question of slavery was settled. But it proved that the vehemence of the few had done its work, and that the conscience and intelligence of the many were to have their way, although long years and a frightful war had to intervene.

In 1872 General Grant was chosen President by a vote which surpassed the vote by which Franklin Pierce was triumphant over General Scott and the Whigs of 1852. It seemed to be a victory which placed the Republicans in power with a new lease of life longer than the old one. It was really, however, only a triumph of law and order and the use and wont of this world

over possible anarchy, disorder, and the unknown. Horace Greeley is always to be revered as the great editor whose mistakes were swallowed up in the great daily service he rendered to humanity and freedom, but the combination between him and his lifelong enemies might, people then thought, produce some dread monstrosity which this country could never endure. Perhaps too great a reliance on this victory had as much to do with the election of 1874 as the struggles of the South to secure a white man's government. That the election of 1874, which changed the House of Representatives from ninety-nine Republican majority to forty-five Democratic was not a real victory expressive of the permanent wishes of the people, is proved by the election of Mr. Hayes over Mr. Tilden, who, whether correctly or incorrectly, was deemed to be a much safer man than his party.

This brings us down to the three last victories of 1890, 1892, and the present year of our Lord. What indications do they give of the sentiments of the people?

The election of the year 1890 was peculiar. It happened under circumstances which have not been well understood, and are perhaps well worth describing. The election in Maine came off in September, and instead of being any indication of the final outcome, as it usually is, it resulted in the re-election of all the Republican members by hitherto unexampled majorities. The tariff act, however, had not been passed, though its nature had been pretty well indicated. That bill, which was passed by the House in May ought to have been enacted, and both Houses ought to have adjourned, by the middle of July. But the bill was delayed in the Senate by the opposition for the better supervision of elections, and did not pass until October, about a month before the election. Of course, there was not the slightest chance to explain its provisions to the people. Truth was absolutely crushed to earth. All the false statements which had been made against the bill had no chance of refutation after its enactment. Before a bill is enacted, especially a tariff bill, it can be attacked, but never defended. Until a tariff goes into actual operation, all the things can be urged against it which the human imagination can conceive; and the human imagination is exceedingly prolific during a heated campaign.

This condition of things was in itself fatal odds, but was the least of our troubles. After the bill passed the House, most of the

mercantile world thought it would be the tariff act, and began to import on that basis. The result was that the importers, jobbers, wholesalers, and retailers were well stocked up; and when the Senate began to amend, every ship beckoned the merchant to make more importations. So it went on up to the time when the bill finally passed. Under ordinary circumstances this would not have made trouble, but, underneath, the whole mercantile situation at that time was a quicksand, which then began to give signs of sinking. The influences which brought down the great house of Barings was then at work, and money became scarce. Men who had imported largely began to find that money—immediate money—was more imperative than distant profits. Hence the commercial travellers were sent forth at once and with urgent orders to sell. Now, if you wish to have a man buy to-day instead of to-morrow, you must tell him why. As the result, every retailer's window was full of inducements to buy, founded on the rise to be caused by the new bill. The rise never came in most cases, but everybody believed it would, and the retailer, once started on the path, put up the future prices of all his goods, even if the McKinley Bill had lowered the "tariff taxes" on them. It followed then, as night follows day, that we found a hundred counters talking against one stump. Every woman who went to a store and tried to buy went home to complain, and a wild unrest filled the public mind. The wonder is that we got any votes at all.

In 1892 we had the remains of our great defeat of 1890 to contend with. We suffered from the most elaborate gerrymanders which ever adorned the history of this country. We had also to meet that unrest which comes slowly with too uniform prosperity, just as it comes quickly with disaster. Discontent will always come to the human race. It often leads to suffering and misery, often leads from wealth to poverty, from prosperity to want; but on the whole it is the mother of progress, and the assurance of a better future. In that conflict the Democratic party had the advantage of its bad character; nobody for a moment believed that it meant its platform, not even to the diminished extent of the late Wilson Bill. It was well understood that Mr. Cleveland favored the rejected plank, which was a near approach to Republican ideas; and as Mr. Cleveland was then the real platform, judicious Republican orators did not venture to predict radical changes. Hence Mr. Cleveland was elected, and with him a Democratic

Senate and a Democratic House. Hardly had Mr. Cleveland taken his oath of office when the people began to have a realizing sense that things which are done are different from things which are proposed. No plans ever quite show what a house will be after it is built. Then came the proceedings of the extra session of Congress, and the people saw what a house they had really built, and that even with Mr. Cleveland as the chief corner-stone it would not do to live in.

I need not rehearse the story of the elections of 1893. In all the States where there are real elections the voice of the people sounded far above all party tocsins and gave what would have been full warning to men of sense and judgment. Unhappily for this country the party in power was under control of those whom elections did not affect, and the work went on regardless of the popular will. In a real republic, where the will of the people is really recorded as expressed, there can be no tyranny. Our forefathers used to say that where annual elections leave off, tyranny begins. Surely even in these degenerate days we may say that where the control of the machinery of government is in the hands of men who are not subject to popular will in free and fair elections, tyranny has already begun. No wonder such men repealed all election laws and sought to sanction their own existence by prolonging the possibilities of their kind. But wrong is never so weak as in its hour of triumph. The very repeal of all the safeguards thrown around the ballot-box will awaken the public attention and stir the public heart. Already the *Atlanta Constitution* is exposing the frauds in its own State of Georgia, one of the most thrifty of the Southern States, where least of all fraudulent elections can be justified by the fear of negro domination. If the partisans in Tennessee should cheat Henry Clay Evans out of his gubernatorial chair so fairly won, that nefarious success will be but the beginning of ruin. No republic can be based on fraud. This is beginning to be seen even in those States where bringing the will of the voter to naught has become a system. At the signs of a change to honest elections all good men rejoice.

The warning which was given by the elections in the East and West, the elections of 1893, though they included all the great States,—those heretofore Democratic as well as those who had voted the Republican ticket in 1892,—was not in the least heeded.

Drunk with the victory of 1892 and out of touch with the real people of the country, the leaders of the party in power went on in the House of Representatives to lay up wrath against the day of wrath. Into details it is not worth while to go. That would be to dig up the buried where it is only needful to point to their last resting-place. The Senate, which had only a small majority under the leadership of the Senators from Maryland, Ohio, and New Jersey, while it did not exhibit too much sense, certainly showed a striking and a valuable contrast to the Executive and the House and probably saved their party from annihilation. This, however, was largely due to the people who made themselves heard there when they had failed in the popular branch.

Then came the elections of last November, so overwhelming and so crushing that they seem to have settled the future of this country for many years.

It would not be wonderful if many men were now asking themselves why it was necessary for this country to undergo so many misfortunes to learn to let well enough alone. The answer is to be found in the nature of the human race as disclosed in the history of the world. Government must express not the opinions of the lowest or of the highest, but the average of all. The vigor of the few may be triumphant for a while, but the ultimate result is the prevalence of the settled opinions of all. To arrive at that we may have to try the bad in order to appreciate the good. When Cromwell and his followers saw the light of liberty, it had not reached the great mass of the people and they had to have Charles the Second to make clear to them that the divine right of all was better than the divine right of any one. So, perhaps, in order to appreciate Republican principles, it was needful to have Hawaii and a "firm foreign policy," Wilson bills and years of disaster. Perhaps, too, the Republican rule of the coming years may improve on the Republican rule of the past as did the England of 1688 upon the England of Cromwell, for we may learn, as did the freemen of that day, something from the conquered enemy.

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